



Another level

Rebecca and Mark Bethell infused an unloved and dilapidated townhouse that was previously divided into bedsits, with colour and warmth

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OPPOSITE Rebecca created a gallery wall from her collection of 20th-century Swedish oil paintings, accrued in the 1990s when she owned an art gallery in North London. She saved the ottoman from a skip, reupholstering it in a neutral linen

THIS IMAGE The Turkish rug was found on Ebay, along with the chair, which Rebecca recovered in an Ian Mankin fabric. The lamps are from Pooky and the cushion from Oka. Bethell Projects made the bespoke alcove shelving



For Rebecca Bethell, the worst houses make the best projects, so she was delighted to come across an Edwardian semi that had been empty for years. The four floors of living space, large, square rooms, high ceilings, and location close to shops and her sons' school ticked all the boxes. The first viewing revealed the property's true condition. 'Seventeen people had lived here in nine bedsits. There were holes in the walls and floors, and I could see straight up to the roof,' Rebecca recalls. 'But I wasn't put off by the horrors; I absolutely love a ruin.'

Unsurprisingly, few period features remained, but the original staircase caught Rebecca's eye, reminding her of the Edwardian properties she had lived in as a student in Edinburgh. 'It wasn't quite as grand, but had the same feeling and somehow the feature struck a chord with me,' she says. 'Then, at the second viewing, I discovered the revolting basement. I was delighted: the extra space completely sold the house to me.'

Rebecca is a project manager and interior designer for her business, Bethell Projects. She took on the renovation of her family home with great enthusiasm, using trades she knew and trusted – much to her husband Mark's relief. With all the space the couple needed, it wasn't necessary to extend, although the basement ceiling was too low – Mark is 6ft 4 and Max, at 15, is already 6ft 3.

'We dug down a metre to make the new ceiling height three metres,' Rebecca explains. 'We tanked the whole floor and fitted lightwells. Now it is a teen den that opens onto the garden, with a guest bedroom, kitchen and laundry. The separate entrance is useful, too, particularly when film crews use the house for location shoots.'

Before they could begin the basement remodel, however, there was plenty of work to do upstairs: stripping walls to reinstall new electrics, plumbing and heating while period-style cornices and dado rails were reinstated. New windows were matched to the originals, as were cast-iron radiators. The parquet on the ground floor, however, was a huge disappointment. 'I thought we had this amazing original floor but it was actually some kind of vinyl,' says Rebecca. 'A flooring supplier found me a close match, which I love.'

Thankfully, the arched details around the windows in the living room and former dining room, now kitchen, were among the original details still in place. 'I knocked through the galley kitchen to create one big kitchen-diner and painted the window frames black to make them stand out beneath the arch. I love black, it is like



a neutral and goes with everything. I've used it throughout the house, including the bathrooms.' Rebecca even bought a black kitchen first time around and painted the walls forest green. The paint began to chip-off the cupboards during the fit-out, however, and a panicked phone call resulted in them being returned and the delivery of a cream kitchen in their place.

'It is a much better choice and the paintwork is more forgiving,' says Rebecca. 'It wasn't long before I found the dark green walls too oppressive, though, so I painted them cream, too – the kitchen looks much lighter and brighter now.'

Back in the hallway, decoration deepens to dark grey with green undertones for a warm, relaxed feel that is echoed in the living room. 'I've always loved the combination of greens with reds,' says Rebecca. 'I grew up in a house with a lot of red Middle Eastern textiles as my parents worked abroad.'

Upstairs, Rebecca turned the main bathroom and a small bedroom into generous en suites for the larger bedrooms. Colours follow the thread from downstairs, with mossy green walls and touches of black in the master bedroom.

'Throughout the house, I have brought in vibrancy with lampshades, rugs and cushions, so if you took everything out, the rooms would look quite neutral, which works well for changing things up later,' says Rebecca.

One of the last projects was the hallway, where Rebecca restored the staircase and painted it black. The following year, the longed-for basement teen den became the last of the horrors to be put right.

'Although a challenge, I really enjoyed bringing the house back from the brink. I know the bones are solid and lasting and I love how it looks,' says Rebecca. 'We can't possibly grow out of living here; we have all the space we need.' ❀

THE STORY

OWNERS Rebecca Bethell, a project manager and interior designer (bethellprojects.co.uk) lives here with her husband, Mark, a lawyer, and their children, Max, 15, and Felix, 14. Rebecca runs Becmead House as a location house (@becmeadhouseshootlocation)

PROPERTY A six-bedroom semi on four floors in Streatham, south London. The house is Edwardian, built in 1903

WHAT THEY DID They altered the layout, knocking through the kitchen and dining room, and created en suites. The walls were stripped to reinstate electrics, plumbing and heating while new windows and internal doors now match the old. They also dug down in the basement to raise the height of its ceiling



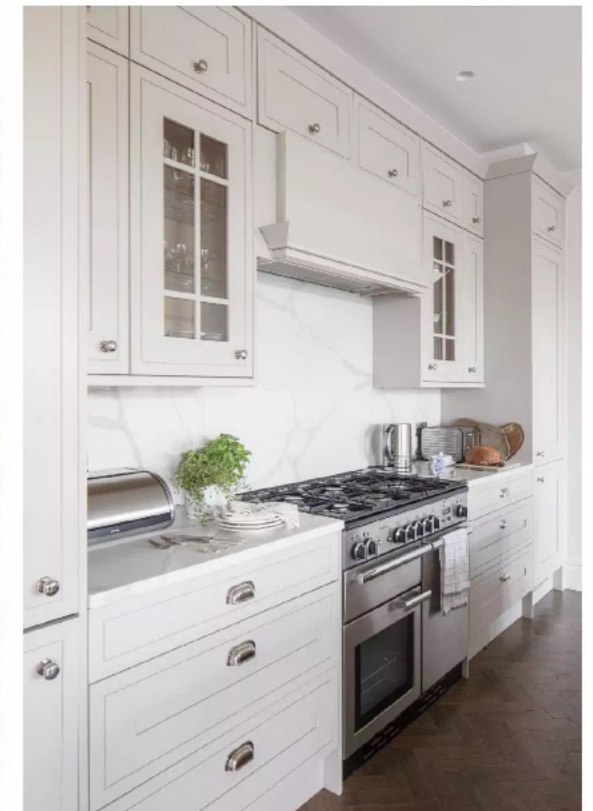
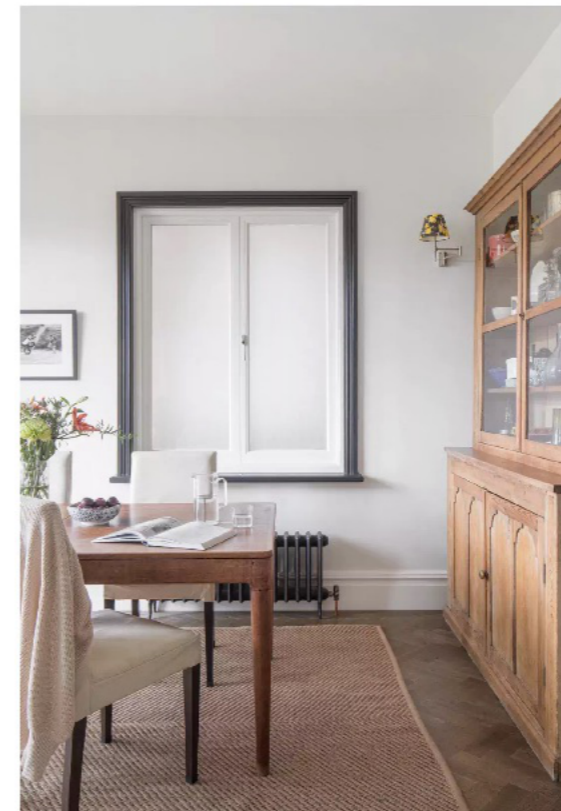
Casual dining is encouraged with bar stools from Ebay that Rebecca painted in Farrow & Ball's Off-Black. She chose Dowling & Reynolds' Bubble chandelier for its pretty shape and alternative look, deliberately hanging it slightly off-centre. The framed Colours of London poster is from Tate Modern and next to it is the Hollywood Star Chart from Dorothy

THIS IMAGE Rebecca grew up with the Danish teak dining table, which her parents bought while living in Brussels in the 1970s

RIGHT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The kitchen was placed on this side of the room as it provides

more space for the island and Howdens' smart Tewkesbury cupboards, arranged in a symmetrical layout, which provide enough cupboards for day-to-day living, while a Marble-effect quartz splashback and worktops are easy to clean and create a streamlined

look; the silver Rangemaster is one of Rebecca's favourite buys; the Victorian dresser from Ebay is used for storing crockery. Pooky's hinged Cagney wall light avoids the glass door and frosted window glass hides the view of the side return





THIS IMAGE A pair of snuggle chairs from Andrew Martin sit in the archway, which creates the perfect seating nook and is one of the few remaining original features. The coffee table from Brissi is painted in Slaked Lime, Little Greene. Mark's parents gave them the antique Chinese chest

RIGHT A custom-made shoe rack painted in Farrow & Ball's Off-Black proved to be the best solution for storing the men's large shoes. The cushions remind Rebecca of her childhood home, which was full of kilims; similar, made from antique Turkish textiles, can be found at the Rug Store



THIS IMAGE A bright yellow velvet bed from Made pops against the Farrow & Ball Inchyra Blue walls, which emphasise the off-white period details in the room. The teak side table is mid-century and one of a pair; similar designs can be found at Bad Marriage Retro

RIGHT Rebecca and Mark chose the bedroom overlooking the garden as their own because of the greenery and privacy. The vintage Turkish rug from Lots Road Auction House, adds bold pattern, along with art and a 1990s Ikea cushion. Walls painted in Little Greene's Grey Moss create a cosy feel





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A grey and black palette nods to classic monochrome Victorian bathrooms; European Heritage's slate tiles offer a modern take on parquet, while The Cielo bath is from CP

Hart; Glossy black tiles, also European Heritage, create a moody feel; In the second en suite, walls in Farrow & Ball's Off-Black contrast with white metro tiles. The vanity is also CP Hart

